



DRAFT FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
*for*  
MARSH-BILLINGS-ROCKEFELLER  
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

## DEDICATION

This plan is dedicated to Laurance Spelman Rockefeller and his long stewardship of this forest.

The true importance of Marsh, Billings, and those who follow in their footsteps goes beyond simple stewardship. Their work transcends maintenance. It involves new thought and new action to enhance and enrich...the past. ...We cannot rest on the achievements of the past. Rather, each generation must not only be stewards, but activists, innovators and enrichers.

Laurance Spelman Rockefeller (1910 -2004)

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# **DRAFT FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**National Park Service**

**U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park**

**Woodstock, Vermont**

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**November 1, 2005**

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US

This Draft Forest Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park's Mount Tom Forest will help guide today's stewardship of the forest and lay important foundations for determining the composition and character of the forest we want to see 100 to 200 years into the future. This draft presents four management alternatives, including a preferred alternative, and assesses the potential effects of each alternative on natural and cultural resources, visitor experience, and the surrounding community.

I would like to thank all those who have participated in the development of this draft—particularly the members of the planning team—for their thoroughness, professionalism and hard work, and their deep commitment to the future of this very special place.

The draft Plan will be available for public review for 30 days. We would be pleased to receive any comments you may have and will carefully review them as a final plan is prepared. To share your comments, or request additional information, please contact:

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We look forward to hearing from you.



Rolf Diamant  
Superintendent

**Please note:** It is our practice to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold a respondent's identity from the record. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, please state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.

Cover photograph: View of sugar maples at the Summer Pasture. (MABI 2003)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mount Tom Forest is a key component of the cultural landscape of the 555-acre Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park and plays an important role in the Park's interpretation and demonstration of stewardship.<sup>1</sup> The Forest Management Plan provides a strategy for managing the Mount Tom Forest that will:

- Perpetuate the tradition of sustainable forest management on the property
- Incorporate a long-term perspective on the changing composition and character of the Forest
- Value the Forest as both a natural and cultural resource
- Emphasize the relationship of the Park's forest management to broader community well-being and sustainability
- Strengthen civic engagement and stewardship

The plan will be guided by seven specific management goals related to:

- historic character
- ecological health
- sustainable management practices
- education and interpretation
- visitor use and recreation
- watershed and community connections
- adaptive management

## SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

The following management scenarios were created to explore and assess different opportunities for addressing these goals:

***Alternative A, Continue Current Management:*** This is the “no action” alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and does not include a long-term strategy for management. The approach would continue the forest management practices that have been implemented since the National Historical Park opened to the public in 1998, which emphasize responding to immediate, short-term needs such as preservation maintenance, interpretation programs, visitor safety, and continuing with projects having a short-term emphasis (i.e., hazardous tree removal, mowing of vistas and fields, and cleanup of storm-damaged trees). Under this alternative, in 100 to 200 years historical features—such as the plantations and old “legacy trees”—would eventually disappear due to gradual decline and decay or potential catastrophic loss. Areas currently in plantations would regenerate to mixed hardwood forest, and resemble other unmanaged, second-growth forests in Vermont.

***Alternative B, Adopt a “Replacement In-Kind” Approach to Historic***

***Preservation:*** This management strategy would focus on preserving the most exact representation of plantations, hardwood and mixed forest stands, open fields, and legacy trees as they existed in 1997, the end of the property’s period of historical significance. As existing plantations decline and no longer represent single-species, even-aged plantings, these areas would be cleared of all trees and replanted with the same species and in the same planting pattern. In order to reestablish and retain plantations, competing regeneration of native plants would be suppressed by using herbicides or mechanical removal. Under this alternative, in 100 to 200 years as visitors travel the carriage roads and trails they would experience single-species plantations at various stages of even-aged growth that reflect the history of forest management from 1874 to 1997, but will not see demonstrations of best current thinking and practices in forest management.

***Alternative C, Continue the Tradition of Applying the Best Current Thinking and Practice in Forest Management:***

This management approach favors the continuation of the long tradition of applying and demonstrating progressive sustainable forestry on the property. The strategy would allow the landscape character to continually evolve to reflect the forest management practices of each new era, and would not take steps to perpetuate individual landscape features that illustrate the history of forest management on the property. As plantation trees age and decline, these stands would be slowly transitioned to mixed hardwood and conifer forests of native species that would regenerate naturally on the site. Existing hardwood and mixed forest stands would be managed to promote greater species and structural diversity. Under this alternative, in 100 to 200 years the forested areas of the Park would become more homogenous as plantations and other historic features are lost. As visitors travel the carriage roads and trails, they would see demonstrations of best current thinking and practices in forest management and experience a landscape with more native hardwood and mixed forest stands punctuated by large, remnant plantation and hardwood trees.

***Alternative D (NPS Preferred), Recognize and Work with Ecological Change in Preserving the Historic Character of the Forest:***

This approach would respect the legacy of forest management implemented by Frederick Billings, and continued by his wife and daughters, and Mary and Laurance S. Rockefeller. The strategy would preserve broad landscape patterns and representative features that contribute to the distinctive historic character of the Forest, while working with the forces of ecological change and continuing to apply best current thinking and practices in forest management. In adapting to the changing ecology of the Forest that favors hardwoods over softwoods, some individual features would not exist as they do today—they might be found in new locations, vary in size, or exist in different stages of maturity as the result of forest growth and change. Overall, this alternative reflects the forward thinking stewardship approach of Mary and Laurance S. Rockefeller, and the care they took in preserving the historic forest character and understanding and working with ecological change.

Along the main carriage roads, opportunities would be pursued to retain edges of plantations or seek out new locations where small-scale plantings of new softwoods might be accomplished. Elsewhere in the Forest, the softwood plantations would transition to a mixed-aged forest with greater diversity of native species and structure, dominated in many areas by hardwoods. Where opportunities exist, forest management would be used to promote the regeneration of seedlings from plantation trees as a new generation of replacements. Consequently, while changes would occur on the landscape, in 100 to 200 years visitors traveling the main carriage road corridors would experience the familiar pattern of fields, plantations, hardwood forests and legacy trees that would evoke a strong sense of the property's history and its legacy of stewardship, and see demonstrations of the best current thinking and practices in forest management.

Many management activities would be the same under Alternatives B, C, and D, such as protecting important ecological areas, preserving stone walls and small-scale features, and maintaining recreational opportunities.

## **SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS**

Potential effects of the four alternatives on a variety of resources and management factors are analyzed in this Plan in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Over the long-term, Alternative A would create a greater ecological diversity, but would have major adverse effect on the Forest's historic character. Alternative C would maintain the tradition of using best current thinking and practices in forest management and foster greater ecological diversity, but would result in moderate adverse effects on the historic character of the Forest. The effects of Alternatives A and C on cultural landscape resources would be considered "adverse effect" under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and potentially an impairment of Park resources under the NPS Organic Act. Alternative B would preserve the Forest's historic character to the greatest degree, but in doing so would have numerous adverse effects on natural resources, aesthetics, and sustainable operations. Alternative D would provide for both the retention of the Forest's historic character and enhancement of the Park's ecological values, educational opportunities, and sustainable operations. Alternatives B and D would have a determination of "no adverse effect" under Section 106, and would not impair any Park resources.

Alternative D is the National Park Service's preferred alternative because it most directly addresses current ecological conditions and forest change while maintaining historic landscape characteristics and patterns. Alternative D also is the environmentally preferred alternative under the criteria established in NEPA.

The Forest Management Plan and Environmental Assessment meets the requirements of National Park Service planning policies, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. It reflects the thoughts and contributions of many individuals and organizations who participated in a variety of public programs and discussions over the last two years.



## READER'S GUIDE:

### WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PLAN

#### **Part 1: Introduction**

This chapter explains the history and purpose of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, the significance of the Mount Tom Forest, the need for a Forest Management Plan, and the approach used in developing the Plan.

#### **Part 2: Context for Management**

Part 2 explores how both the natural and cultural histories of the Mount Tom Forest have influenced the landscape, and discusses the challenges and opportunities that these forces pose to the future management of the Forest.

#### **Part 3: The Future of the Mount Tom Forest**

This chapter provides a long-term vision for the Mount Tom Forest and specific management goals, and describes four management alternatives for reaching these goals.

#### **Part 4: Description of the Mount Tom Forest**

Part 4 describes the existing cultural and natural resources and current management activities associated with the Mount Tom Forest.

#### **Part 5: Potential Effects of the Alternatives**

This chapter examines the potential effects of the four management alternatives on the resources and management activities associated with the Mount Tom Forest, and discusses why Alternative D is both the National Park Service's preferred alternative and the "environmentally preferred alternative."

#### **Part 6: Preparers, Public Involvement, and Agency Consultation**

Part 6 identifies the planning team, project advisors, and recipients of this document, and outlines the steps the planning team undertook to involve the public and federal, state, and local governmental agencies in the Plan's development.

#### **Part 7: References**

Part 7 provides a list of works cited, guiding laws and policies, and a glossary of terms used in this Plan.

#### **Appendices**

Appendices A, B, C, and D provide supporting reference materials associated with this Plan.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> “Park” is used in this document to refer to both the physical place and to the administrative unit of the NPS that manages it.